

# The 'BFA' Self-assessment Guide

## Part 3: Assessing your institution's support of low-income students

This self-assessment is designed to help you take stock of how your institution addresses a variety of financial concerns facing low-income students. We recognize that most institutions already provide many of the services and implement several of the approaches identified in this assessment. Also, some items are directed solely at community colleges or baccalaureate-level institutions, given their unique differences. These questions are designed to help you think about how deeply ingrained these services and approaches are and about whether they are integrated in ways that best serve students.

Note that this inventory is not designed to identify deficiencies. Rather, it offers an opportunity to identify where you already have traction and determine existing activities that can be broadened or deepened. It can also inform you of the many additional ways low-income students can be served and help you determine new activities your institution might implement. Finally, it may uncover areas for growth and improvement that might require more substantive planning and longer-term action. The action planning guide in Part 4: *Interpreting your self-assessment results and strengthening support to low-income students* can support this reflection and planning.

We recommend that a core team of leaders at your institution take this self-assessment as a group. For example, consider embedding this self-assessment into the activities of an existing committee (e.g., a student success committee). Your core team could include the administrators and practitioners at your institution who oversee academic affairs and/or instruction, student development and/or services, financial aid, admissions, enrollment, and institutional research and planning. Using the assessment in this way will likely lead to more rapid interpretation

of results and allow for more focused action planning. At the same time, we recognize that interacting with the self-assessment as a team may be difficult, given time and scheduling constraints. Other options include having all members of the core team independently complete the assessment and convene to discuss their individual results or designating a leader to taking the self-assessment who then presents the results to a core team for reaction and discussion. Part 4 offers guidance on interpreting and building consensus around the results of the self-assessment.

This inventory is divided into the six strategies of the framework described in Part 2: *Exploring six strategies to support low-income students*:

- Strategy 1: Know the low-income students at your institution.
- Strategy 2: Provide supports to help low-income students overcome practical barriers.
- Strategy 3: Leverage external partnerships for service delivery on campus.
- Strategy 4: Empower low-income students to use available resources.
- Strategy 5: Review your internal processes.
- Strategy 6: Implement effective practices to strengthen the progression of all students.

# Strategy 1: Know the low-income students at your institution

The items in this section are designed to help you assess how well your institution understands the experiences of its low-income (and other) students — including the rates at which they achieve success, where they fall short of their goals, what their needs may be and where there is opportunity for targeted improvement. Knowing the reality of your institutional data and what these data suggest is a critical first step in determining how you act to improve success and completion rates, especially for your most needy students.

You may not currently collect, analyze or use many of the types of data identified in the questions below; few institutions, if any, collect all of them regularly. The point of this section is to identify critical data sources that can be used to understand and serve all of your students — particularly low-income students.

## Rating scale

The scale for these items is:

- A = We do this regularly for most or all students.
- B = We have done this, but not regularly and/or not for all students.
- C = We have not done this at all.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. My institution has identified the number of low-income students.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. My institution tracks unmet need levels for each individual student.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. My institution tracks the completion rate of low-income students and compares it to those of other segments of students.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. My institution disaggregates unmet-need levels and completion rates and other measures of success by ethnicity and gender.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. My institution analyzes and uses the information on the FAFSA concerning supplemental nutrition and other income/benefit supports.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. My institution analyzes and uses the information on the FAFSA concerning the presence of applicants' dependent children.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. My institution tracks the number of students who come out of foster care.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. My institution tracks student usage and resulting outcomes of institutional, state and federal services designed to support low-income students.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. My institution tracks how many low-income students are working, how many hours they are working and when they are working.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. My institution tracks employability and wages of its low-income students while enrolled.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. My institution tracks employability and wages of its low-income students after completing/graduating from our programs.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. My institution tracks the reasons low-income students drop out.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13. My institution helps low-income students monitor their credit scores.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. My institution measures progress of low-income students on the metrics identified above over time.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15. <b>(Community college only)</b> My institution tracks low-income student enrollments in workforce-training programs such as short-term certificate programs and/or non-credit workforce training that allow for quicker entry into the workforce at the end of or while enrolled in programs. | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Strategy 2: Provide supports that help low-income students overcome practical barriers

The items in this section are designed to help you assess which services and supports you already provide to low-income students, and in turn, how well you create a financial support system for these students in particular. There are many and varied programs, approaches and initiatives to serve low-income students, as identified below. It is very unlikely that any institution would have all, or even many, of these efforts in place. This section is designed to help you identify where your institution can expand and/or strengthen your assistance to low-income students. It should also be noted that these items are rooted in the conviction that, while student loans can be a piece of a financial stability package, they should not be the primary method of providing funds to low-income students.

### Rating scale:

The scale for these items is:

- A = We have these services on campus and they are widely used by students.
- B = We have these services on campus, but they are not widely used.
- C = We rarely do this or don't do this at all.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

1. My institution provides assistance to link its low-income students with public benefits, including supplemental nutrition (e.g., SNAP/food stamps, food pantry), Medicaid, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), energy assistance, etc. This may range from referring students to off-campus support services to having external agencies and organizations on campus to help with applications and support.
2. My institution maintains an active food bank for its low-income students.
3. My institution provides or partners to provide low-cost or no-cost child care for its low-income students.
4. My institution provides or partners to provide financial counseling services to students and their families.
5. My institution provides access to or connects students with banking institutions that provide financial products such as low-income checking and savings accounts.
6. My institution uses its automotive program to serve its low-income students or provides assistance for automotive repair.
7. My institution works with local public transit authorities to ensure low-income students have public transit access to the institution.
8. My institution provides low-income housing or links students to local low-income housing options.
9. My institution provides health care services for its low-income students on campus or connects students to local low-income healthcare options.
10. My institution ensures that courses and academic programs are scheduled to be available to low-income students who work at different times (e.g., morning/afternoon/evening).
11. My institution offers critical financial stability programs (e.g., financial aid, financial coaching) in the evening as well as during daytime hours.
12. My institution has a well-publicized emergency assistance program for low-income students who encounter episodic but disruptive life events that hinder their ability to attend school.
13. My institution provides or partners to provide low-income students with both federal and state tax preparation assistance to ensure they receive available earned income supports and credits.

- 
14. My institution has a well-publicized legal assistance program for its low-income students or connects low-income students to off-campus opportunities for legal assistance.
- 
15. My institution ensures that eligible low-income students apply for federal Pell grants.
- 
16. My institution ensures that low-income students apply for any available state low-income or customized grants (e.g., underrepresented minority students, veterans, working mothers).
- 
17. My institution ensures that low-income students apply for locally available private grants and scholarships.
- 
18. My institution ensures that low-income students apply for local, state or institutional tuition-reduction grants.
- 
19. My institution has an active work-study program that ensures qualified low-income students are placed in positions that provide them with the additional income they need.
- 
20. When other non-repayable options are explored and exhausted, my institution matches low-income students to low-rate student loans to ensure that they can meet their education goals.
-

## Strategy 3: Leverage partnerships for service delivery on campus

There are numerous partner opportunities that institutions can use to help low-income students progress and complete. Several opportunities exist to tie in to local, state and national organizations that can aid your efforts to best serve low-income students. The goal of this section is to assist you in identifying existing partnerships that can be further leveraged and/or thinking beyond the typical sources of support to other groups and organizations that your institution might approach.

### Rating scale:

The scale for these items is:

- A = We maintain robust partnership(s) with external provider(s) who offer these services to students on campus.
- B = We have arrangements with and direct students to off-campus partner(s) providing this service.
- C = We have an emerging partnership or no partnership focused on providing this service.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

1. My institution partners with organizations that provide (or could provide) free legal services to low-income students.
2. My institution partners with organizations that provide (or could provide) workforce and state benefits to low-income students.
3. My institution partners with other programs in the community to support low-income students.
4. My institution partners with financial institutions to provide financial counseling and products such as free or reduced-price checking and savings accounts to low-income students.
5. My institution partners with financial institutions to provide investment products such as individual development accounts to low-income students.
6. My institution partners with organizations to provide tax coaching and preparation to low-income students.
7. My institution partners with state or county human service agencies or other local non-profit organizations that provide application assistance for public benefits (e.g., SNAP/food stamps, housing, health care).

## Strategy 4: Empower low-income students to use available resources

When seeking to strengthen support of low-income students, it is often important to change their outlook on both the variety of available supports and the important role of financial stability in meeting their education goals. Even when a variety of campus-based services and a network of partners providing additional supports are offered, institutions should engage in continuous, widespread and intentional outreach to ensure that students are aware of and use these resources. We encourage you to focus this outreach on destigmatizing and normalizing the use of these services in your students' minds. In normalizing what is available, we encourage institutions to consider an "opt-out" model — one that requires students to actively decline benefits or services in order to exclude themselves. (For instance, a benefits screening or a financial literacy course can automatically be included in a mandatory student success class.)

The following items are written as student outcomes; institutions can work to ensure that students achieve these outcomes through the approaches and partnerships listed above. Because you may not now measure how deeply students achieve these outcomes, you may need to infer your responses. As these

outcomes become more prominent at your institution, you may develop data-collection paradigms to assess how well students are meeting these goals.

### Rating scale:

The scale for these items is:

- A = We actively work on multiple levels to support the development of this outcome.
- B = We do some things to help support the development of this outcome.
- C = We are not actively working to support the development of this outcome.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

1. Students at my institution consider financial assistance to complete their education goals to be a normal and widespread benefit for all students.
2. Students at my institution view financial aid as an investment in their future success and financial sustainability.
3. Students at my institution view financial assistance as more than Pell grants, scholarships and student loans.
4. Students at my institution understand the implications of the 6-semester and 12-semester limitations on Pell grants and the urgency for credit accumulation that they create.
5. Students at my institution participate in a benefits screening process — not just those students who arrive at the institution knowing they need financial assistance.
6. Where appropriate, students at my institution receive public benefits such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or SNAP/food stamps.
7. Where appropriate, students at my institution complete the FAFSA and have structured assistance in completing the forms.
8. Students at my institution understand the full costs of attending the institution and the different ways to pay for it, including the differences between loans, grants and scholarships.
9. Students at my institution understand the potential return on their investment in education when they enter the workforce.
10. Students at my institution are learning about investment products that can help them grow their assets while still in school such as individual development accounts.
11. Students at my institution are learning about long-term investment planning strategies for when they enter the workforce (e.g., savings accounts, money market accounts, education saving plans, retirement savings).

12. My institution includes financial awareness and stabilization as institutional learning outcomes.
- 
13. Where possible, my institution has shifted strategies to “opt-out” — where services are provided to all students unless they specifically decline them, rather than the traditional “opt-in,” where students must actively seek or request services.
14. My institution has a measurement system in place to assess how well the institution is producing these outcomes.
-

## Strategy 5: Review your internal processes

In most organizations, processes are developed over time and often end up conflicting with current realities or failing to properly adapt to changing circumstances. It is important to reflect on how your institution's processes interact, especially from the perspective of a student attempting to navigate them. From there, review, update and streamline these processes to ensure that students have the clearest and quickest path to getting the services they need. These items ask you to look across traditional silos, departments and programs within your institution to focus on how students use your services.

### Rating scale:

The scale for these items is:

- A = We do this regularly to ensure that all low-income students are being served.
- B = We have done this, but not regularly for all low-income students.
- C = We rarely do this or don't do this at all.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

1. My institution has a flowchart or similar document that indicates the steps low-income students need to take to enter and navigate the student services processes related to financial stability resources — and it uses this document to ensure that the processes are efficient and connected.
  2. My institution has added pre-screening to its student intake processes to automatically route students potentially in need of aid to the person or people on campus who can provide the necessary services.
  3. My institution gives low-income students a clear visual roadmap showing them where to go to receive our entire suite of support services.
  4. My institution has reviewed and realigned business and academic processes to meet low-income students' needs.
  5. Please address each of the following sub-items separately:
    - High-level administrators regularly review and adapt institutional policies and practices to prioritize the needs of low-income students.
    - Faculty use their direct role with low-income students to implement policies and practices to help ensure their success.
    - Student services professionals in financial assistance programs work directly to ensure that low-income students get the financial support services they need.
    - Student services professionals not in financial assistance programs regularly connect the low-income students with whom they interact to key financial stability services.
  6. My institution provides information and education to faculty and student services professionals to ensure that all campus stakeholders understand the circumstances and challenges faced by low-income students.
  7. My institution regularly communicates to faculty and staff about the programs and services available to support low-income students and systematically shares this information with students.
  8. Offices, departments and programs across my institution collaborate on an ongoing basis to improve and expand services to low-income students.
-



## Strategy 6: Implement effective practices to strengthen the academic progression of all students

This final section does not relate solely to low-income students; rather, it represents good institutional practices that can serve all students. The items explore efforts related to career planning, structured programs, improved onboarding, customized student support and integrating labor market data. Efforts in these areas can help any student succeed but are particularly useful in helping address obstacles that often confront low-income students.

### Rating scale:

The scale for these items is:

A = We do this regularly to help ensure the success of all students.

B = We have done this, but not regularly for all students.

C = We rarely do this or don't do this at all.

For each item, enter the appropriate letter in the box at right.

---

### Self-assessment items:

1. My institution works with all incoming students to match their interests and skills to potential careers.
2. My institution has structured programs of study, each with a clearly identified path to completion.
3. My institution helps students choose a program of study by the end of the first semester.
4. My institution has an early alert system that allows faculty to recommend central support services to those students who are underperforming (e.g., in terms of attendance, academics or behavior) during the first few weeks of each semester.
5. My institution uses technology to regularly monitor the academic decisions (e.g., courses, majors) that students make and assigns individuals to intervene to get students back on track.
6. My institution helps students monitor their own progress toward their education goals.
7. My institution measures and provides information to students on the full cost of each program and the expected starting salary in related careers.
8. My institution presents wage and employability data to students before and/or as they make choices about programs of study.
9. My institution shares median student loan debt by program with students to help inform their selection.
10. My institution provides robust and targeted job search/placement services for students nearing the end of their program pathways.
11. My institution monitors program completion rates for transfer-focused students (CC only) or for incoming transfer students (four-year only).
12. My institution monitors on-time graduation rates for all programs of study.
13. My institution measures job retention after program completion at yearly intervals.
14. My institution routinely collects feedback from key employers on how well our graduates are demonstrating both specific and general learning outcomes in the workplace.
15. My institution tracks the wages of students after they complete their programs.

16. **(Community college only)** For students more focused on immediate entry to the workforce, my institution has a significant number of structured career pathways, including short-term certificates of less than one year, long-term certificates of one year or more, and career/technical degree programs.
- 
17. **(Community college only)** For students focused on transfer, my institution has structured and clearly articulated transfer pathways to the most common receiving four-year institutions.
- 
18. **(Community college only)** My institution monitors program completion rates for students in career and technical education (CTE) programs.
-